

THE MAYOR'S REPORT



(The photo on the top row is from the Essence Magazine special feature in the May 2018 issue. The photo on the left of the 2nd row is of the special presentation to the Bladensburg High School Varsity Boys Basketball Team during the April 9th Council Meeting. The photo on the right of row 2 shows my enthusiasm for the annual Earth Day Clean Up at Quincy Run.)

May 2018

Mayor Takisha James Report on April Activities

The 2018 Maryland General Assembly session came to an end on Monday, April 9:

The 438th session of the General Assembly came to an end with a total of 3,101 bills introduced. The flurry of proposed bills covered school funding, education policies, bi-partisan support for tax and infrastructure packages to attract Amazon to Montgomery County, gun violence, gang crime prevention and renewable energy were hot topics considered during this session. Following are a few highlights on major issues addressed during the session.

Operating Budget: The \$44.5 billion operating budget passed with bipartisan support. The process was not without debates on schools (regarding teacher pay, settling the dispute about local control over school day calendars, capital investments in aging schools and school security enhancements throughout the state). After weathering nearly a decade of drastic cuts to local governments, highway user revenues were partially restored to counties and municipalities. Legislation passed unanimously in the House and Senate to restore \$500 million to local governments for a period of five years, beginning in FY20.

Taxes: Federal tax changes threatened to disproportionately impact Maryland, since a large part of the Maryland tax code is tied to the Federal tax code. It was estimated that these changes would negatively impact Maryland families had the state not stepped in. A bill to permit Marylanders to continue to file itemized deductions eliminated at the Federal level, passed unanimously. Legislation to increase the standard deduction will provide Marylanders a small tax break along with expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, there will also be some relief to low-income adults without dependents.

Paid Sick Leave: This session the General Assembly overturned Governor Hogan's 2017 veto on paid sick leave. This swift action triggered a 30-day timeline for the bill to take effect and become a law on February 11th in Maryland.

Minimum Wage: Legislation to increase the minimum wage in Maryland by \$1 per hour until the minimum wage becomes \$15 per hour in 2023 was heard in both chambers. Now that sick leave legislation has passed, the minimum wage will return in the next session with large support.

Maryland's Response to Federal Healthcare Coverage Changes: Congressional efforts to dismantle the Affordable Healthcare Act included the repeal of the individual mandate and several fiscal policy changes. This resulted in increased health insurance costs (of 30% - 50%) and limited growth of the Maryland Health Benefits Exchange (MHBE). In response to these issues the Maryland General Assembly passed two bi-partisan bills. One bill authorizes the state to request a Federal waiver to divert Federal funds into an MHBE reinsurance program. The second bill imposes a premium tax on Maryland insurers to generate an additional \$380 million. This tax replaces a similar Federal tax exemption and is roughly equivalent to what the insurers would have paid in Federal taxes this year. Using this money for a reinsurance fund will lower premiums for everyone in the individual insurance market and fend off a potential crisis created by extreme health insurance premium increases. These solutions are temporary and the General Assembly will be working on long term solutions moving forward.

Meetings & Events

1. April 5 – Region tests alert system:

On the morning of April 5, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments helped 20 area jurisdictions coordinate a test of the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system. Cell phones or other mobile devices received the following message: "A test of the [jurisdiction name] Wireless Emergency Alert System. No action required." WEA triggered a loud noise and text message on cell phones and enabled mobile devices. The Town sent advance notices of the tests to the community to avoid any unnecessary alarm during the tests.

2. April 5 – Municipal Collaboration Meeting:

Lieutenant James Flynn who manages the Maryland Energy Assistance program, held a meeting with the Prince George's County Municipal Collaboration. He reported the following updates for 2017:

- a. **47 towns and cities participated**
- b. **99 houses were completed**
- c. **\$750,000 were obtained in MEA grant funding**

Given that we have learned funding will decrease to \$350,000 in FY19, the Town will focus on making sure funding is prioritized to the local municipalities before distributing resources to other areas.

3. April 9, 16, 30 – Budget Meetings:

The annual budget planning process started in March and continued during the month of April. We held three budget meetings last month with council worksessions on April 9, 16 and 30. Mr. Vito Tinelli, the Town Treasurer walked the council through each line item for every departments and we discussed whether or not adjustments needed to be made for the coming year. Residents are encouraged to attend each of the remaining budget meetings to learn more about the plans for the coming year and share their input.

4. April 10 – Remembering Council Member Beverly Hall:

As the Council previously shared with the community, we lost Council Member Beverly Hall (Ward 2) on April 1st. Members of Town staff, former Mayor Walter L. James, Jr. and I attended her funeral service to celebrate her life on Tuesday, April 10th. I want to thank members of the Bladensburg Police Department for assisting with the police escort of Ms. Hall's funeral procession to the gravesite following the service. The Town of Bladensburg will continue to keep her family in our prayers.

5. April 13 – Senior Apartment Coordinators Meeting:

I met with Town Administrator Sandlin, Officer Rinehart and senior apartment coordinators for the Emerson House and Newton Green Senior Apartments. This meeting provided an opportunity to share information representatives from each property, address concerns and seek to find solutions for any common challenges they might be facing. We will meet again in June and open the meeting up to all managers for multi-family buildings within the Town.

6. April 16 – Prince George's County District Council Oral Argument Hearing regarding Special Exception 4792 Ernest Maier Concrete Batching Plant:

I testified on behalf of the Town in favor of the Special Exception application for Ernest Maier. As you may recall the Town Council held a number of meetings in 2017 where input from the community was solicited and utilized to develop a letter of conditional support for this expansion. After negotiations with Ernest Maier they agreed to each condition without exception. In light of this level of commitment from the applicant, it was only responsible for The Town to proceed with conditional approval of this expansion. Since the time of the hearing, the District Council pushed the case back to the Zoning Hearing Examiner who originally approved this application. There will be more to come on this in the coming weeks.

7. April 18 – Bladensburg High School Women’s History Program:

I was given the honor of serving as the keynote speaker for the 2018 Women’s History Program. During my remarks I shared my personal story and encouraged students to reach for their goals in spite of any challenges they may be facing. I also shared an overview of how local government works and differs from other levels of government.

8. April 19 – Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan honors World War II veteran at the Peace Cross:

Governor Larry Hogan visited Bladensburg to honor Second Lieutenant John Robert Pedevillano - a World War II veteran, Prisoner of War, and Purple Heart recipient - with an official governor’s citation. The ceremony was held at the Peace Cross Memorial in recognition of Lieutenant Pedvillano’s military service and dedication to Maryland and the United States. He is a true American hero who was very deserving of this honor!

9. April 21 - AWS Earthday Clean-Up

The Town partnered with the Anacostia Watershed Society to hold a major cleanup effort at Quincy Run. This year’s event was another success and we made a major impact on that part of the community by removing trash and collecting bottles for recycling. (See photo #2 on page 1.)

10. April 25 – Maryland Black Mayors Monthly Meeting:

Candidate for Prince George’s County Executive, State Senator Anthony Muse, attended the meeting to share information about his campaign and vision for the County. The mayors asked questions of the candidate relating to public safety, economic development, and the TNI (Transforming Neighborhood Initiatives). Similarly, Prince George’s County States Attorney, Angela Alsobrooks was invited to attend a meeting in February to field questions from the mayors. MBM is working to invite other candidates to attend the remaining meetings prior to the June primary.

11. April 25 – Women’s Essence Reception hosted by Mayor Bowser:

African American Mayors Association Board Member, Mayor Muriel Bowser and Essence Magazine hosted a reception for the unveiling of the African American Women Mayors Photo currently being featured in the May 2018 issue of Essence Magazine. I was invited to be a part of the special feature highlighting African American women mayors along with a number of change agents representing many walks of life from actresses, activists, and entrepreneurs. This was a tremendous opportunity and I still feel blessed and am honored to have been selected to represent the Town in such a positive manner in a national publication. (See photo at the top of page 1.)

Upcoming Meetings/Events

- Saturday, June 2:
 - The Annual Bladensburg Bike Rodeo at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM.
 - Join us for Public Safety Day at the David C. Harrington Park from 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM.
- Monday June 4, 2018
 - Make plans to attend the next Worksession at 5:30PM & Televised Council Meeting at 7:00PM at Town Hall.
- Friday, July 6, 2018
 - Mark your calendar for the Town’s Independence Day Celebration. The festivities will begin at 6:00 PM – 9:30 PM. Bring your blanket or beach chair and join us at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park for a night of food, fun and fireworks as we celebrate the birth of our nation!